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ABSTRACT

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Student Publications Experience of Journalism and Mass Communication Educators

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Student Publications Experience

of Journalism and Mass Communication Educators

Abstract

This paper presents the results of a random e-mail survey of college and university journalism and mass communication educators about their high school and college student publications experience. The study found that 61.5 percent of the educators had high school experience and 72.4 percent had college experience. In addition, 40.9 percent of the respondents decided to pursue journalism and mass communication as a career before or during high school.

Student Publications Experience of Journalism and Mass Communication Educators

Proponents of scholastic journalism point out that society in general and the field of journalism and mass communication specifically benefit from students who become involved in journalism in high school. The field of journalism and mass communication benefits as young people exposed to scholastic journalism later become employees at newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations, print shops, public relations and advertising agencies, and so forth.

In addition, college and university journalism and mass communication schools and departments also benefit as students exposed to scholastic journalism enroll as majors or minors, helping to fill classrooms across the country, although there is little research documenting this transition. Becker, et al. (1999) reported, "Enrollments in journalism and mass communication programs in the United States increased 5.6 percent in the autumn of 1998, representing the fifth year of growth in enrollments and producing an enrollment total that is almost certainly unprecedented" (p. 5). This Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Enrollments does not, however, delve into reasons why the growth has occurred, other than the comment: "Enrollments are reflective of the national pattern of undergraduate enrollment growth and the consequence of the demand for higher education by the children of the post-war growth in population—a 'baby-boom' echo effect" (p. 20).

Even if students who participate in high school journalism do not pursue a college degree or a career in journalism or mass communication, proponents of scholastic journalism point out that such students are better citizens, having been involved with or at least exposed to the healthy give and take of public information exchange in a democratic society.

There is another aspect, however, of this triad (student publications experience, journalism and mass communication studies in college, and journalism and mass communication careers) that

is unexplored. Is scholastic journalism experience also a stepping stone to college/university journalism and mass communication teaching careers? Common sense would indicate that yes, of course, many college and university journalism and mass communication educators most likely started as student journalists. But, there is no published research to document that assumption.

Purpose of study/research questions/assumptions

The purpose of this study was simply to survey journalism and mass communication educators (specifically, members of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication or AEJMC) about their high school journalism and their college journalism experience and to ask them to pinpoint when they decided to pursue journalism and mass communication as a career.

The following questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do current journalism and mass communication educators have high school and college journalism experience?

2. Do journalism and mass communication educators with high school and college journalism experience look back on that experience as being positive or negative?

3. When did journalism and mass communication educators decide to pursue a career in journalism and/or mass communication?

Based on a previous pilot study exploring the same questions, the researcher made the following assumptions:

1. One third to one half of journalism and mass communication educators will indicate they had high school and college journalism experience.

2. A majority of journalism and mass communication educators with high school and college journalism experience will look back on that experience as being positive.

3. One third to one half of journalism and mass communication educators will indicate they decided to pursue journalism and mass communication as a career while in high school.

Literature Review

Journalism Professionals

Linda Evanchyk shared the preliminary results of her survey of professional journalists who began as student journalists at the 1998 mid-winter meeting of AEJMC's Scholastic Journalism Division. Later, in *C:JET* she published an article, listing nearly 50 such persons, including such well-known names as Dave Berry, Walter Cronkite, Katie Couric, Roger Ebert, James Kilpatrick, Allen Neuharth, Bernard Shaw, and Abigail Van Buren (1998, p. 11).

Her article included quotes from professional journalists who spoke in glowing terms about the value of their high school journalism experience. For example, CNN anchor Martin Savidge said,

> Please! Let me be your poster child! If not for the journalism/communications class that I took back in high school, I can honestly say I would not be where I am today. It was 1975, the first year the class was offered. I signed up and it changed my life! The class was simple, even basic, but it opened my eyes to the exciting career that has now become a profession of which I am proud. (p. 10)

Responses like these were typical and many professional journalists described their work on high school journalism staffs as a life-changing experience.

Although various researchers through the years have surveyed journalism and mass communication professionals, Evanchyk's study appears to be one of the only, if not the only one, to inquire specifically about the respondents' high school journalism experience.

Weaver and Wilhoit's advance report (1992) on *The American Journalist in the 1990s* published by The Freedom Forum and their later book (1996) by the same title with a subtitle of *U.S. News People at the End of an Era* covered a wide range of areas. Citing a previous study, Weaver and Wilhoit wrote that in 1971 "nearly 60 percent of all U.S. journalists were college graduates, and 34 percent majored in journalism" (1996, p. 29). In their own studies they found, "In 1982-83, nearly 75 percent of all U.S. journalists completed a college degree, and 40 percent

majored in journalism. In 1992, 82 percent of all U.S. journalists earned a college degree, and 40 percent majored in journalism" (p. 29).

Weaver and Wilhoit did not ask questions specifically about the respondents' high school journalism experience, but they did ask, "In looking back, why did you become a journalist?" According to the authors:

> Their open-ended replies offer interesting "freeze-frames" of memories about career choice. The sketches of journalism's attractiveness cover a wide range of categories, and more than one was cited in many of the answers. The most common themes, however, were an early "love" of writing [37 percent of the 1,400 respondents cited an aptitude for writing as their main reason for being a journalist], an aptitude for the "digging" of reporting, a desire to "make a difference," the field's being intrinsically "interesting," a penchant for "current events" or immediacy, and college experiences. (p. 51)

Weaver and Wilhoit's summary above did not identify respondents as specifically mentioning high school experiences as a reason for becoming a journalist. However, they wrote, "Particularly among newspaper journalists, the sense of being a good writer was linked to student newspaper experience or a high school teacher" (p. 52) and "The importance of a high school teacher or the high school newspaper was remembered by about 5 percent of our respondents" (p. 55). Given the enthusiastic response to Evanchyk's questions, it is curious that only 5 percent referred to their high school journalism experience.

Weaver and Wilhoit also asked respondents how influential a number of people were in developing their ideas about what's right and wrong in journalism. They found that 17 percent of the respondents mentioned high school teachers as extremely or quite influential in matters of journalism ethics, compared to 21 percent for college teachers and 88 percent for newsroom learning (p. 154).

Voakes (1997) conducted a national survey of daily newspaper journalists, finding that 29 percent cited the school newspaper or newspaper adviser as the most significant influence on their decision to work in journalism, but it was not clear whether they were referring to the college or

high school newspaper. When asked when they first decided to choose a newspaper career, 25 percent said while in high school.

Journalism and Mass Communication Educators

A list of journalism and mass communication educators who began as student journalists similar to Evanchyk's list of professional journalists who did so does not exist in the literature, but there are studies that document various other aspects of AEJMC members.

The Project on the Future of Journalism and Mass Communication (1984), which became known as the Oregon Report, was a solid start to the study of journalism education, but it focused mostly on curriculum rather than on the educators themselves.

Weaver and Wilhoit reported in 1988 that although several studies during that decade systematically examined journalism and mass communication educators, "much more has been written about these educators that is based on anecdotes and impressions." They reported that the "few systematic studies have focused mainly on the academic and professional backgrounds of educators, the issue of equity between men and women faculty members, and job satisfaction" (p. 7). Weaver and Wilhoit surveyed nearly 900 full-time journalism and mass communication educators at four-year colleges and universities in the United States, including those not listed in the AEJMC directory. Regarding these educators, they examined: the size of the workforce and geographical distribution, age and gender, ethnic and religious origins, parents' occupation, rank, politics, education, media experience, various aspects concerning job conditions and satisfactions and the educators' professional culture. The extensive study, however, did not ask faculty members about their experience in high school or college journalism.

Weaver and Wilhoit found that as undergraduates more than half (55 percent) of all mass communication faculty majored in journalism, radio-television or communication. These figures were similar to those for United States journalists in general, suggesting, according to the authors that "the undergraduate education of both journalists and faculty members is similar in emphasis. Faculty members are somewhat more likely to have majored in communication than are journalists (15 percent versus 7 percent), but otherwise the percentages are nearly identical" (p. 15).

However, journalism and mass communication faculty were much more likely to have majored in communication in graduate school than professional journalists who completed a graduate degree and much less likely to have majored in journalism.

Winds of Change: Challenges Confronting Journalism Education (1996) by Betty Medsger surveyed three groups: 1,041 print and broadcast journalists labeled as "new journalists" with one to 11 years of experience, 500 newsroom recruiters and supervisors at print and broadcast media organizations, and 446 university journalism educators. The Freedom Forum commissioned this major study of journalism education. President and Chief Executive Office Charles Overby wrote, "The central skills of an excellent journalist—the ability to systematically gather, analyze and communicate information—are also central to higher education" (p. v).

The three groups were asked a wide variety of questions. A few questions touched on fringe aspects of college media experience; only one question dealt with high school journalism. The educators were asked: Does your journalism education program require majors to publish or broadcast stories? (56 percent yes, 42 percent no).

The newsroom recruiters and supervisors were asked how important six different areas were in preparing for an internship or entry-level job in journalism. One area was campus newspaper or broadcast experience (54 percent said very important, 40 percent somewhat important, 5 percent not too important, and 1 percent not important). They were also asked: Does your news organization sponsor or co-sponsor a summer high school journalism program in your area? (24 percent said yes and 76 percent no or don't know). That was the lone question in the surveys of the three groups that referred to high school journalism.

The new journalists were asked: What was the single most important factor that made you want to become a journalist? At 28 percent, a love of writing topped the list, while only 2 percent said high school newspaper experience. The respondents were asked if they worked as a journalist on their campus newspaper (63 percent did), their campus radio station (25 percent), their campus television station (14 percent) and their campus magazine (13 percent). Overall, 78 percent reported that they worked in college media.

Winds of Change was critical of journalism education. In the preface, Overby wrote that (1) more emphasis needs to be placed on the teaching of writing, editing, and the history, law, and ethics of journalism, (2) "the pendulum has swung too far in favoring advanced degrees over professional experience in hiring and promoting journalism educators," (3) journalism educators impart too much gloom and doom about the future of newspapers and broadcast news, and (4) budget-conscious university administrators too often "lump everything from journalism to speech pathology under one roof."

Riffe, Salomone and Stempel III (1998) published the results of their survey of over 1,000 AEJMC members they described as currently active faculty. They obtained demographic data (gender and ethnicity by rank and teaching area, years of professional experience and AEJMC membership, highest degree earned, advising and service activities, scholarly productivity, salary) as well as ratings of institutional and colleague support, concerns with workplace issues, and job satisfaction.

In January 1999 AEJMC published a monograph follow-up of these authors' 1998 article titled *Journalism Educators: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* that included AEJMC members who were retired faculty and those who were graduate students. Their study's six-page questionnaire with more than 100 items covered many important areas, but it did not include any items about respondents' high school or college experiences in journalism and mass communication.

In summary, the literature reveals that various studies have examined a wide variety of enlightening aspects about journalism and mass communication educators in the United States, but their previous experience as a student journalist in high school is not one of those areas.

Methodology

In 1998 the author conducted an informal pilot study of journalism and mass communication educators, asking a few Scholastic Journalism Division members to gather data on the number of full-time journalism and mass communication faculty members at their college or university who worked on their high school and/or college yearbook, newspaper or radio or

television station. Later, SJD members received a survey form at a mid-winter meeting, plus a request for information was published in the March 1998 issue of Scholastic Source. In August 1998 the author reported that division members at 16 schools had responded, representing 142 faculty members. Of that total, 38 percent knew they wanted to make a career out of journalism/mass communication while in high school and 64 percent had worked on their high school newspaper, yearbook or both.

This study approached the topic in a more systematic, scientific way. The original questions were polished and revised with an eye toward convenience and conciseness so that the survey could be conducted via e-mail. In *Mail and Internet Surveys*, Dillman (2000) suggests various design principles for e-mail surveys, such as personalizing all e-mail contacts so that none are part of a mass mailing, keeping the cover letter brief to enable respondents to see the first question without having to scroll down the page, informing respondents about alternative ways to respond, and making it easy for respondents to mark answers (pp. 367-371).

The author followed those suggestions, as well as testing the survey and response options in different e-mail software. Each survey contained a personalized salutation (i.e., Dear Professor Smith). Respondents could answer by using the reply option in their e-mail program and by typing an "x" to indicate their response. Nearly all of the participants responded this way. A handful deleted the questions and listed their responses and two mailed their answers. Sacrificing the amount of data that could be obtained for the sake of respondents' convenience, the survey contained only 14 items. The e-mail subject heading was "5-Minute JMC Educator Survey," and recipients were told in the introduction that they could complete the survey in five minutes or less. After the 14 items, respondents were told: "The 5-minute survey is over, but if you have a little more time, you could respond to part or all of the following" three open-ended questions:

- If you have scholastic journalism experience, do you have any comments you wish to make about that experience?
- Do you wish to share anything about "the turning point(s)" in your life that prompted you to pursue journalism/mass communication as a career?

- Do you wish to share anything about "the turning point(s)" in your life that promoted you to consider college/university teaching?

Over one-third of the 301 respondents completed one or more of the open-ended items.

AEJMC has about 3,400 members, of which about 85 percent have e-mail addresses listed in the current (1999-2000) directory, according to AEJMC headquarters. The author decided that if roughly 2,900 members listed e-mail addresses, the survey would be sent randomly to every fourth member with an e-mail address or around 725 members (25 percent). It became quickly apparent, however, that considerably less than 85 percent of the members listed their e-mail addresses. Thus, after selecting a random starting point, the survey was sent to every third member with an e-mail address.

As a result, 556 e-mail surveys were sent; 94 were returned immediately as undeliverable. In a few cases; messages indicated that the individuals had moved or retired. Most of the undeliverable messages were to graduate students and/or teaching assistants, international AEJMC members, or members whose listed e-mail address was an obviously older version that was not forwarded. In addition, 10 surveys were refused, not useable, or lost (after a follow-up e-mail, respondents said they had replied, but the response had not arrived) and six surveys were returned as not applicable. Thus, the number of useable surveys was 446.

The e-mails were sent out 50 at a time over a three-week period in January and February 2000. Although respondents were given, on average, 10 days to respond, the bulk of the responses came back within 24 hours. For each group of 50, a handful of responses came back within an hour or two. The initial response for the complete mailing was 48 percent. After a reminder survey was sent, the response rose to 67.5 percent with 301 of 446 surveys returned.

Unexpected problems in the random selection process were the number of retired faculty members who maintain their AEJMC membership and graduate students. The author decided to skip retired faculty members and to send surveys only to graduate students listed as teaching assistants. In a few cases, the author also skipped over obviously non-teaching AEJMC members.

Findings

Of the 301 respondents, 63.7 percent were male and 36.3 percent were female. This corresponds closely to the most recently published survey of AEJMC members (Riffe, et al.,1999) that found a 67.4 percent male and 32.6 percent female breakdown. In this study, 85.8 percent of the respondents were white, while 14.2 percent were non-white, also similar to the Riffe, et al. breakdown of 88.6 percent white and 11.4 percent non-white (p. 2).

By rank, 30.6 percent were full professors, 37.2 percent associate professors, 23.9 percent assistant professors, 3.7 percent instructors/lecturers, 2 percent graduate students/teaching assistants, and 2.7 percent other (such as deans). Riffe, et al. found 28.0 percent full professors, 31.4 percent associate professors, 34.9 percent assistant professors, and 5.7 percent instructors/lecturers (p. 2). By rank, there tended to be more undeliverable e-mail surveys to assistant professors.

The survey asked what the undergraduate enrollment was at the department or school of journalism and mass communication where the respondents taught. Overall, 36.2 percent of the respondents taught at schools with an undergraduate enrollment of 100 to 400 students, 26.6 percent with 401 to 700 students, 12.6 with 701-1000 students, 10.6 percent with less than 100, 7.5 percent with 1,001 to 1,500 and 6.5 percent more than 1,500.

The survey asked: How long have you been teaching at the college/university level? (The author did not specify full-time.) Thirty percent of the participants had been teaching 13 to 20 years, 29.3 percent six to 12 years, 18.2 percent 21 to 30 years, 16.2 percent five years or less, and 6.4 percent more than 30 years. Again, these findings were similar to a previous study. *Winds of Change* (1996, p. 75) found that 26 percent of the survey respondents had been teaching full-time more than 20 years (compared to 24.6 percent for the current study) and 32 percent had been teaching full-time 11 to 20 years (compared to 30.0 percent who had taught 13 to 20 years in this study).

This survey also asked: How many years of professional journalism/mass communication experience do you have? Overall, 35.9 percent of the respondents had five years or less

experience, 29.9 percent six to 12 years, 15.9 percent 13 to 20 years, 12.6 percent 21 to 30 years, 3.6 percent no experience and 2 percent more than 30 years. In *Winds of Change*, 47 percent of the educators had 10 years or less experience of full-time experience, 36 percent had more than 10 years, and 17 percent had no experience (p. 74). The lower percentage of respondents indicating no experience in this study can be partially attributed to not specifying "full-time." Some respondents listed short-time internships as professional experience.

Respondents were asked: What is your primary teaching area? Advertising, broadcast journalism, new media, photojournalism, print journalism, public relations, and other (please list) were the choices. As expected, a wide variety of combinations among the choices and numerous areas that respondents added make it difficult to classify the responses. In summary, 101 of the respondents (34.2 percent) listed print journalism. Thirty-nine respondents (13.2 percent) selected broadcasting, 38 respondents (12.9 percent) listed public relations, 30 respondents (10.2 percent) indicated advertising, 17 respondents (5.8 percent) listed new media, and seven (2.4 percent) indicated photojournalism. Sixty-three respondents (21.4 percent) selected other, with the most common areas being law, ethics or mass communication courses (i.e., mass communication theory and research, media and society, or media studies). Six persons did not list their teaching area.

Research Questions and Assumptions

As indicated earlier, this study had three guiding questions and assumptions. The first question and corresponding assumption were:

- To what extent do current journalism and mass communication educators have high school and college journalism experience?
- One third to one half of journalism and mass communication educators will indicate they had high school and college journalism experience.

Respondents were asked: Did you work on your high school: (a) newspaper, (b) yearbook, (c) radio station, (d) television station? As Table 1 indicates, of the 301 respondents, 185 (61.5 percent) said they participated in high school journalism, while 116 (38.5 percent) did not. Table 2 shows that of the 185 who did, 83 (44.9 percent) worked on the newspaper only, 57 (30.8

percent) on the newspaper and yearbook, 32 (17.3 percent) the yearbook only, and six (3.2 percent) radio station only. Seven other respondents indicated other combinations. The author was too conservative in his one-third to one-half assumption as closer to two-thirds of the respondents in this random sample of AEJMC members indicated they had high school journalism experience.

TABLE 1
PERCENTAGE OF JMC EDUCATORS WITH HIGH SCHOOL JOURNALISM EXPERIENCE

	Total Responses	**% of Total**
Yes	185	61.5%
No	116	38.5%
Total	185	100.00%

TABLE 2
TYPE OF EXPERIENCE FOR JMC EDUCATORS WITH HIGH SCHOOL JOURNALISM EXPERIENCE

	Total Responses	**% of Total**
Newspaper	83	44.9%
Newspaper and Yearbook	57	30.8%
Yearbook	32	17.3%
Radio	6	3.2%
Other Combinations	7	3.8%
Total	185	100.00%

This study's finding of 61.5 percent who had high school journalism experience was very similar to the author's unscientific pilot study of 142 faculty members at 16 schools, which found that 64 percent had high school journalism experience. It is interesting to compare this study's results with Dvorak's findings that 40 percent of high school journalism teachers/ advisers "served on the staffs of publications while they were high school students" in *Journalism Kids Do Better* (Dvorak, Lain, Dickson, 1994, pp. 116-117).

As might be expected, the percentages were even higher for college journalism experience. Again, respondents were asked: Did you work on your college: (a) newspaper, (b) yearbook, (c)

radio station, (d) television station? Of the 301 respondents, 218 (72.4 percent) said they had college journalism experience; 83 (27.6 percent) said they did not. (See Table 3).

TABLE 3 PERCENTAGE OF JMC EDUCATORS WITH COLLEGE JOURNALISM EXPERIENCE		
	Total Responses	**% of Total**
Yes	218	72.4%
No	83	27.6%
Total	301	100.00%

TABLE 4 TYPE OF EXPERIENCE FOR JMC EDUCATORS WITH COLLEGE JOURNALISM EXPERIENCE		
	Total Responses	**% of Total**
Newspaper	109	50.0%
Newspaper and Yearbook	24	11.0%
Radio	24	11.0%
Newspaper and Radio	20	9.2%
Newspaper, Radio, Television	10	4.6%
Radio, Television	9	4.1%
Yearbook	7	3.2%
Newspaper, Yearbook, Radio	5	2.3%
Television	4	1.8%
Other Combinations	6	2.8%
Total	218	100.00%

Of the 218, 109 (50.0 percent) had worked on the newspaper only, by far the biggest percentage (see Table 4). Twenty-four respondents (11.0 percent) said they worked on both their college newspaper and yearbook and 24 (11.0 percent) in radio. Twenty persons (9.2 percent) worked for their college newspaper and radio station. Ten (4.6 percent) worked at their college newspaper, radio and television station. All of the remaining combinations had less than 10 respondents. Again, the author was much too conservative in his one-third to one-half assumption as closer to three-fourths of the respondents in this random sample of AEJMC members indicated they had college journalism experience. In comparison, Dvorak found that nearly 27 percent of high school journalism educators worked on college publication staffs (pp. 116-117).

The second question that guided this study and the corresponding assumption were:

- Do journalism and mass communication educators with high school and college journalism experience look back on that experience as being positive or negative?
- A majority of journalism and mass communication educators with high school and college journalism experience will look back on that experience as being positive.

Participants in this e-mail survey were asked: If you have high school scholastic journalism experience, how would you rate that experience overall? A Likert scale from 1 (very positive) to 5 (very negative) was used. Of the 161 respondents with high school journalism experience who responded, 92 (57.1 percent) assigned a ranking of 1 or 2, 34 (21.1 percent) assigned a 3 and 35 (21.8 percent) assigned a 4 or 5 to their experience. (See Table 5.) Thus, the assumption that a majority would view their experience as positive held up. It should be noted that based on responses elsewhere on the survey, it appeared as if in a few cases the respondents may have not read the question carefully and assigned a 4 or 5 when they really meant a 1 or 2. Thus, the relatively high negative rating (one out of five) maybe be inflated somewhat.

TABLE 5
RESPONDENTS RATING OF
HIGH SCHOOL JOURNALISM EXPERIENCE

	Total Responses	% of Total
1 (very positive)	64	39.8%
2	28	17.4%
3	34	21.1%
4	22	13.7%
5 (very negative)	13	8.1%
Total	166	100.00%

The respondents were also asked: If you have college scholastic journalism experience, how would you rate that experience overall? Of the 199 respondents with such experience who responded, 131 (65.8 percent) assigned a ranking of 1 or 2, 36 (18.1 percent) assigned a 3 and 32 (16.0 percent) assigned a 4 or 5 to their experience. The assumption that a majority would view their experience as positive was especially conservative in this instance. (See Table 6.)

TABLE 6 RESPONDENTS RATING OF COLLEGE JOURNALISM EXPERIENCE		
	Total Responses	**% of Total**
1 (very positive)	93	46.7%
2	38	19.1%
3	36	18.1%
4	16	8.0%
5 (very negative)	16	8.0%
Total	199	100.00%

In the previous pilot study, the author found that some respondents not only had high school journalism experience, but they also obtained some professional experience while in high school. Thus, the author asked: Did you work in professional (non-school) media in (a) high school or (b) college? Overall, 166 respondents (55.1 percent) said they had professional high or college journalism experience, while 135 (44.9 percent) had neither.

Of the 166 respondents who had experience, 20 (12.0 percent) had professional experience in high school, 40 (24.1 percent) had professional experience in both high school and college and 106 (63.9 percent) had professional journalism experience in college, as Table 7 shows below. Professional high school experience most commonly took the form of working at a family newspaper, writing for a local newspaper or working for the local radio station. College journalism experience took the same forms along with internships. In comparison to college educators, Dvorak reported: "One rather surprising finding about media experience is that more than 24 percent of today's high school journalism educators have spent time working in some aspect of professional journalism" (p. 117).

TABLE 7 PERCENTAGE OF JMC EDUCATORS WITH PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE WHILE IN SCHOOL		
	Total Responses	**% of Total**
In High School	20	12.0%
In High School and College	40	24.1%
In College	106	63.9%
Total	166	100.00%

The third question and assumption were:

- When did AJEMC members decide to pursue a career in journalism and/or mass communication?
- One third to one half of journalism and mass communication educators will indicate they decided to pursue journalism and mass communication as a career while in high school.

In this e-mail survey, the author asked: When did you decide to pursue journalism and/or mass communication as a career? The options were: in high school, in college, after college and other (explain briefly). Of the 301 respondents, 105 (34.9 percent) said in high school. (Voakes' study of daily newspaper journalists cited earlier found that 25 percent decided to pursue a newspaper career in high school.) In addition, 100 respondents to this study (33.2 percent) said in college, 62 (20.6 percent) said after college, 29 (9.6 percent) selected other and 5 (1.7 percent) did not answer the question. Of the 29 "other" responses, 11 simply provided further elaboration to the "after college" response, such as "while serving in the U.S. Navy," "after getting a master's degree in business administration," "after doing fund-raising/media relations for my children's school." The author added those to the after college category, increasing that response to 73 (24.3 percent). (See Table 8.)

TABLE 8
WHEN JMC EDUCATORS DECIDED
TO PURSUE JMC AS A CAREER

	Total Responses	% of Total
In High School	105	34.9%
In College	100	33.2%
After College	73	24.3%
Before High School	18	6.0%
Did Not Answer	5	1.6%
Total	301	100.00%

The remaining 18 (6.0 percent) respondents who choose "other" indicated they decided to pursue journalism and/or mass communication as a career before high school. One respondent said the decision took place at age 7, one at age 9 (when "I felt a visceral rush when doing a math

homework assignment that entailed figuring out newspaper production and distribution costs; it was solidified when I was 12 and started a junior high paper"), two at age 10 (one as a paper boy and the other who "began writing a neighborhood newspaper"). One respondent never forgot that his third-grade teacher told him he would "make a good reporter." Eight others indicated they made the decision in elementary school (one who played radio announcer in the fourth grade, another who went on air in that grade.) Five persons said they made the decision in junior high school.

The author's low end assumption that one-third of the respondents would indicate they decided to pursue journalism and mass communication as a career in high school was right on target. Again the results of this study correspond quite closely to the earlier pilot study. Of the 142 faculty members at 16 colleges/universities in that study, 38 percent indicated they knew they wanted to make a career out of journalism/mass communication while in high school.

These results can also be compared to Becker and Park's 1993 report for The Freedom Forum cited in *Death by Cheeseburger* (1994). They found that 53.2 percent of male college journalism graduates made their decision to study journalism during college and 46.8 percent before college, compared to 49.3 percent of female college journalism graduates who decided during college and 50.7 percent before college (p. 41). They also reported that African Americans were "more likely than any other ethnic group to decide early in life to study journalism" (p. 35). Sixty-two percent of African American college journalism graduates decided to study journalism before college, compared to 55.3 percent for Asian Americans, 49.6 percent for whites, 47.2 percent for Native Americans, 47.1 percent for Hispanics, and 45.5 percent for Pacific Islanders.

Open-Ended Responses

As indicated earlier, respondents who had more time to spend on the survey could reply to three open-ended questions. In the introduction to the survey, the author wrote that in a previous pilot study, "Among my own colleagues, I found out information I didn't know even though I had worked with them for years. The survey was fun and informative. I'm expanding it via a random e-mail survey of AEJMC members. What's your story? I'd like to hear it and combine your information with that of others."

Over one-third of the respondents replied to one or more of the open-ended questions, and it was evident that many respondents found it enjoyable to tell their story and reminisce. Several respondents said "thank you" for the opportunity to take the survey, a refreshing and atypical reaction in academia.

In the written responses to "If you have scholastic journalism experience, do you have any comments you wish to share about that experience?," numerous respondents shared comments, mostly positive, a few negative, some dealing with high school or college experience only, some dealing with both high school and college, and many referring to teachers and/or advisers who had an impact. Positive comments to this item included:

> One of the most important things I ever did in my life.
>
> It was an invaluable learning experience, and the teachers who give up the time to coach students involved in that stuff deserve a special place in heaven (though they'd probably be just as happy with a little more money!)
>
> I had a marvelous high-school journalism teacher at a small Nebraska high school. She was well-read, an accomplished writer and a marvelous teacher. She was extremely demanding, and she insisted on high-quality work. She made us stretch our horizons beyond our small high school. She instilled us with confidence. She is 98 years old today—and still better read than I am. When I return to my hometown to visit my mother, I always stop in to see my high-school journalism teacher.
>
> It allowed me to learn that journalism was something I very much enjoyed, gave meaning to my life and wanted to pursue while at the same time providing a rather safe environment in which I could experiment and make mistakes without drastic consequences.
>
> Next to the love of friends and family, scholastic journalism was the most important experience in shaping my identity through college age, contributing to who I am today. ... Scholastic journalism taught me valuable life skills in social interaction, leadership, personal expression, the formulation of personal values, and the role of the individual in society. Besides all that, of course, I learned journalism. The fact that those skills and journalism were packaged together is probably why I continued to have such undying allegiance to journalism, even though I could have taken the broader life lessons on to do something else. Aside from my personal experience, I want to add that scholastic journalism is a crucial component of the media in our society, performing in the scholastic microcosm every function that the media performs in society at large: informer, chronicler, critic, entertainer, and defender of freedom.
>
> Our teacher . . . taught us AP style; didn't make any bones about the need for accuracy; encouraged us to think critically and pushed us to push ourselves. His efforts have forever changed the lives of many and while some did not pursue a career in journalism, they are few.
>
> To my knowledge, neither the principal nor the school board ever tried to censor the newspaper. ... Such freedom was a tremendous learning experience, and yet we published

articles about many controversial subjects (and editorials with many strong opinions, including criticism of the school's administrators) without causing anyone any harm other than perhaps irritating them. What is happening now [because of the Hazelwood case] is a tragedy.

It allowed me to learn that journalism was something I very much enjoyed, gave meaning to my life and wanted to pursue while at the same time providing a rather safe environment in which I could experiment and make mistakes without drastic consequences.

A good high school journalism teacher is the key to getting kids interested early on. We had an excellent one. Even though I had been writing stories, poems, etc., from first grade on up, I doubt that I would have chosen journalism without the inspiration of this teacher. I probably would have been one of those pitiful English majors.

Experience on my high school yearbook staff and in college media was very valuable. Unfortunately, many students today don't have the work ethic and knowledge that gives you before coming to college.

I was fortunate to have a high school journalism teacher who really believed in the free student press (well before Tinker) and who taught us well, then let us put out a paper unencumbered by his breathing down our backs. We never let him down. He was a class act.

I was lucky to have a high school journalism teacher who was very engaging. She inspired many of us, including those who did not pursue journalism careers.

The more hands-on and practical, the better. I had the chance to be news director of the radio station, host talk shows on radio and cable television and do news stories for cable TV. While in college, I met a broadcast news director in the nearest ratings market and my career took off.

If you mean by this experience working on a high school or college publication then my experience was outstanding. A great high school adviser (former *Life* magazine staffer) really set my direction in life. And then a college adviser "sealed my fate."

It was excellent, considering it was, after all, high school. We learned the beginnings of clear writing, deadlines and responsibilities, both as workers and beginning journalists. ... Working on the high school paper, under a firm but relaxed adviser, was a chance to try (and fail) at the journalistic calling. I loved it, and it was a springboard to later events.

Despite all the warts associated with scholastic journalism, particularly at a small college, I learned much. It was great for me because I could mature as a journalist slowly. I had helpful and forgiving editors and an advisor who encouraged me. If I had started in a professional newspaper without that experience, I would have failed quickly. I needed the growing room my college newspaper (and yearbook) provided for me.

The best experience is in being an editor on an almost totally independent paper. You end up making lots of tough calls and thereby exponentially broadening the situations to which you are exposed. What I learned as an editor on a campus paper was tremendous preparation for issues I had to grapple with as a senior editor on a professional paper many years later.

> In college I worked on the *Daily Illini* with Roger Ebert and others of his era. I knew it was the most fun I had ever had.
>
> [My] college experience included a lot of real-time radio and TV news in actual on-air radio and television stations. There was no better educational environment than that.

As indicated earlier, one of five respondents rated their high school journalism experience as negative, but only a few persons explained why in the open-ended item. Three of the negative responses were:

> In high school the experience was much too closely monitored, now I would say censored, by teachers who did not have professional journalism experience and who were primarily concerned with their own standing with the school administration. In college, it was exactly the opposite experience.
>
> One was taught by people who were too overworked to really make it a good experience (for anyone, themselves included); the other was a "student collective" model that was completely disorganized and had illusions about their level of skills).
>
> At both the high school and undergraduate levels, I was in academic environments that had neither formal journalism education structures nor trained teachers to advise the extra-curricular journalism activities. What I learned about journalism was passed along by students.

Conclusion/Discussion

The results of this random e-mail survey of nearly 450 current journalism and mass communication educators answers the three original research questions:

1. To what extent do current journalism and mass communication educators have high school and college journalism experience?

2. Do journalism and mass communication educators with high school and college journalism experience look back on that experience as being positive or negative?

3. When did journalism and mass communication educators decide to pursue a career in journalism and/or mass communication?

First, the study supported the common sense but previously unresearched assumption that many college and university JMC educators started as student journalists. Overall, 61.5 percent of the respondents said they had participated in high school journalism, and 72.4 percent said they had college journalism experience.

Thus, a fourth prong can be added to the three-prong argument of scholastic journalism proponents that high school journalism experience benefits society as a whole as well as resulting in college and university journalism majors and minors and future professional journalism and mass communication employees. Scholastic journalism experience is also, logically, a stepping stone for those who become college and university journalism and mass communication educators. In a related issue, Becker, et al. (1999) point out that although undergraduate JMC enrollments have increased every year since 1993, graduate enrollments have dropped 6.3 percent since 1995. The authors express concern that journalism and mass communication programs are producing an inadequate number of persons with advanced degrees to train future undergraduates (pp. 20-21).

Among those respondents in this study who had high school journalism experience, 57.1 percent rated that experience as very positive or positive. Of those who had college journalism experience, 65.8 percent rated it as very positive or positive. The author is not sure what to make of these figures. Although a majority of the respondents indicated their high school and college experiences were positive, 21.1 percent were neutral about their high school experience and 18.1 percent about their college experience. Overall, 21.8 percent rated their high school experience and 16.0 percent rated their college experience as very negative or negative. These percentage leave room for improvement.

If over 60 percent of college and university journalism and mass communication educators have high school journalism experience, it would seem logical that such prior experience would translate into strong support for high school journalism. The author's experience and interaction within AEJMC circles, however, indicate that such support does not really exist. Perhaps the seeming lack of support can partially be explained by the findings that four out of 10 educators with high school experience rated that experience neutrally or negatively.

It is also puzzling that the literature review revealed, in some cases, a surprising lack of credit given to high school journalism among professionals. In Weaver and Wilhoit's study, only 5 percent of the journalists cited a high school teacher or newspaper as a reason for becoming a journalist. In *Winds of Change*, only 2 percent of the new journalists cited high school newspaper

experience as a reason for wanting to become a journalist. Only Voakes' study had more encouraging numbers, with 29 percent of the respondents citing a high school newspaper or adviser as the most significant influence on their decision to work in journalism. In both cases—the profession and academia—perhaps the intervening years between high school journalism and the work world somehow weaken the tie for many individuals.

As for the third question, the study found that 40.9 percent of the respondents decided to pursue journalism and mass communication as a career before or in high school. The author plans to pursue the career aspect of this study in more detail in another paper, combining the data about when respondents decided to pursue journalism and mass communication as a career with a survey item asking respondents when they first considered a college/university teaching career. Respondents' comments about their career choices are a wealth of data for future analysis, including comparing career selection data in this study with similar research in other fields.

Although answering the three initial questions, the study also uncovered other questions that require additional examination of the data. For instance, are there any demographic factors that help predict journalism and mass communication educators' likelihood (1) of participating in high school or college journalism, (2) of deciding before, during or after high school on journalism and mass communication as a career, and (3) of rating their scholastic journalism experience as positive or negative? Does gender, years of professional experience, the size of the respondent's school, whether it is accredited or not, or whether it is a school or department of journalism or a school or department of communication help predict the factors listed above? Does race affect any of the factors (as ethnic background did in Becker and Park's survey of college journalism graduates)?

The answers to the three questions posed in this study, additional examination of the data in this study, as well as additional studies that examine other aspects of the relationship between college/university journalism and mass communication educators and scholastic journalism will help to further define and enhance the role that scholastic journalism plays in both the academic side and the professional side of the journalism and mass communication field.

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